

# Awareness and Attitudes Toward the “Nutrient Rich Foods” Concept by School Nutrition Directors

September 2009

**School Nutrition Association**



*Making the right food choices, together.*

**School Nutrition Foundation**



*Education, Research and Scholarship*

**National Dairy Council**



# **Report on the Findings from a Survey of School Nutrition Directors on the “Nutrient Rich Foods” Concept**

## **BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES**

The National Dairy Council, in conjunction with the School Nutrition Association and the School Nutrition Foundation, conducted a survey to understand the awareness of the concept of “nutrient rich” as well as measure attitudes toward this concept. The information gained from this study is a first step in helping the School Nutrition Association and School Nutrition Foundation explore these concepts within the context of school nutrition programs.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A link to an online questionnaire was sent to approximately 4,634 e-mail addresses in the School Nutrition Association’s membership database for director-level members. A follow up email was sent to this same group two weeks after the initial invitation, reminding members to complete the survey.

The survey was fielded on June 3, 2009 and was closed on June 25, 2009. The questionnaire included the following sections:

- School Nutrition Demographics: Location, Enrollment, Role in School Nutrition Program
- Nutrition Principles
  - Awareness of *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommendations,
  - Awareness & familiarity with the concept of Nutrient Rich Foods
  - Attitudes toward the concept of Nutrient Rich Foods

Survey Monkey was used as the online data collection and analysis tool. Both Microsoft Excel and Survey Monkey were used for data analysis and presentation.

## RESULTS

### ***Response Rate***

A total of 590 responses were received from SNA director-level members. Using this figure, the response rate was approximately 12.7%. However, this response rate does not factor in the number of email addresses that were blocked or filtered before reaching the intended recipient. 88% of these 590 respondents completed the entire survey. Since the survey items were not dependant on one another, both complete and incomplete survey data is included in the analysis.

### ***School Demographics***

97.6% of the respondents indicated that they worked in a school district. This question was intended to filter out respondents that might have roles that are not directly affiliated with a specific school nutrition program yet still are in SNA's director-level membership category. The target respondents were those who are currently working in a school district's school nutrition program. Therefore only data from this target group is included in the analysis.

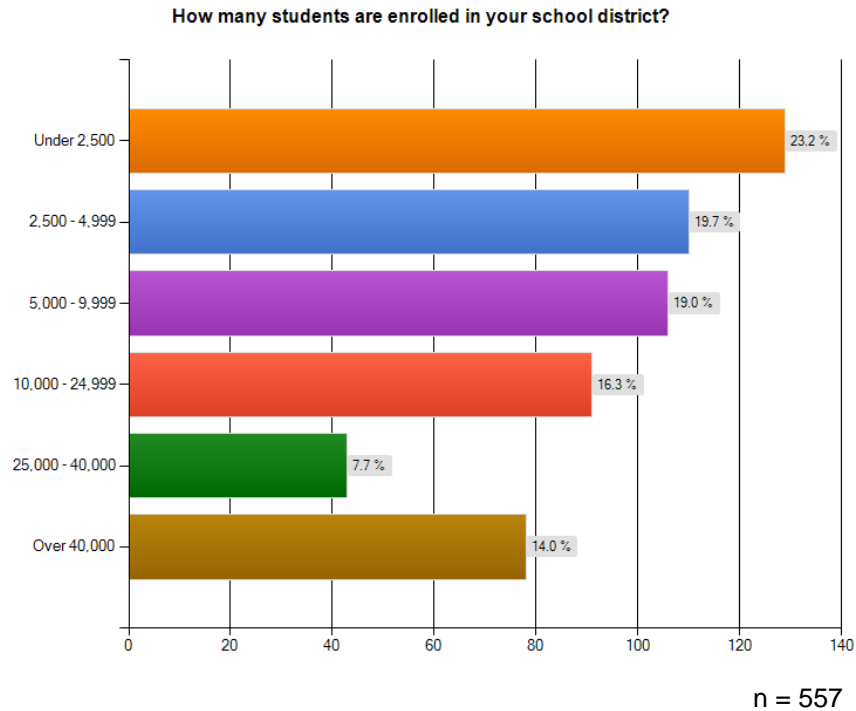
### ***Regions***

Responses were received from school nutrition directors-level members in 44 states. The Southeast Region had the largest share of responses with 23.1% of respondents from this region. The Northwest Region had the smallest share of responses with 4.9% of respondents from this region. Shares of respondents from other regions fell in between. This geographical distribution of respondents is similar to SNA's overall membership distribution.

<b>SNA Region</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Northeast	12.8%
Mideast	11.3%
Midwest	15.1%
Southeast	23.1%
West	10.4%
Southwest	10.6%
Northwest	4.9%
Did not Respond	11.8%

## Enrollment

Respondents represented varying sized districts.



## Roles within School Nutrition Program

Almost all respondents are involved, to some extent, in menu planning (96.2%). 74.3% indicated that menu planning is primarily their responsibility and an additional 21.9% indicated that they assist in menu planning within their program.

Fewer respondents are involved in nutrition education initiatives (66.5%)

- 31.0% are involved in cafeteria and classroom initiatives
- 34.4% are involved in just cafeteria initiatives
- 1.1% are involved in just classroom initiatives
- 15.2% indicate that others in their program are involved in nutrition education.
- 17.6% indicated that their program is not involved in nutrition education initiatives.

The size of the school district had an effect on the roles of respondents. School nutrition directors from smaller sized districts were more likely to be primarily responsible for menu planning (versus assisting with menu planning) when compared to directors from larger programs. Additionally, smaller sized districts were less likely to be involved in nutrition education compared to larger districts.

## Nutrition Principles

### U.S. Dietary Guidelines

Every respondent indicated that they are aware that the 2005 U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommend that Americans increase their intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk/milk products.

(n=509)

### Nutrient Density/Rich Awareness

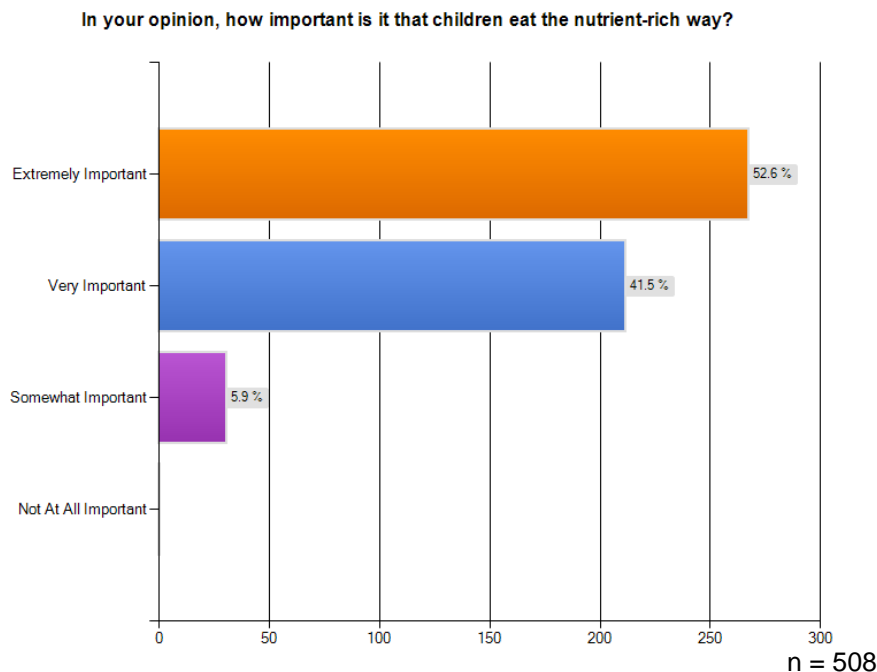
89.4% of respondents indicated being aware of the principle of “nutrient density/nutrient richness.” Respondents from smaller sized districts are less likely to be aware of “nutrient density/nutrient richness” compared to respondents from larger districts.

89.6% of respondents indicated being familiar with the provided definition of “nutrient density/nutrient richness.” As with awareness of this concept, respondents from smaller sized districts tend to be less familiar with this concept compared to respondents from larger districts.

### Nutrient Rich Attitudes

Almost all of the respondents (94.1%) indicated that it is either “extremely important” or “very important” that children eat the nutrient rich way.

School district enrollment and awareness of the nutrient-rich principle had an effect on the perceived importance of children eating the nutrient rich way. Respondents from larger districts tended to rate the importance higher than respondents from smaller districts. Additionally, respondents who were not aware of this principle were more likely to indicate that it is “somewhat important” versus “extremely important.”



Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements related to the concept of nutrient rich. The following table illustrates the respondents' agreement or disagreement with these statements. Across all of the statements, respondents who indicated not being aware of the term “nutrient density/ nutrient rich” tended to have a weaker attitude (or agreement level) compared to respondents that were aware of the term (i.e. these respondents tended to choose the “somewhat” option more than those who were familiar with the concept).

Respondents Generally Agreed with the following statements (listed in descending order of agreement strength)			
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
<i>We need to help children think positively about what foods to eat instead of negatively</i>	98.2% 82.7% Strongly 15.5% Somewhat	1%	0.8%
<i>The nutrition advice that has the most positive impact on a child's health is an approach that includes nutrient-rich foods from all the food groups.</i>	93.2% 63.8% Strongly 29.4% Somewhat	4.8%	2.0% 0.4% Strongly 1.6% Somewhat
<i>In order to ensure that children reach their daily dietary and caloric needs, the total nutrient package of individual foods must be considered.</i>	92.8% 55.4% Strongly 37.4% Somewhat	5.0%	2.2% 0.6% Strongly 1.6% Somewhat
<i>All foods can fit into a healthy diet.</i>	84.3% 49.4% Strongly 34.9% Somewhat	4.0%	11.7% 3.2% Strongly 8.5% Somewhat
<i>Low-fat and fat-free dairy foods are "nutrient-rich."</i>	73.9% 43.6% Strongly 30.3% Somewhat	16%	10.0% 1.8% Strongly 8.2% Somewhat
<i>Dairy provides a unique nutrient package that cannot be substituted with supplements or calcium fortified foods.</i>	77.8% 35.7% Strongly, 42.1% Somewhat	11.0%	11.2% 2.4% Strongly 8.8% Somewhat
<i>The effect of lactose-intolerance has made it difficult for many children to achieve the daily recommended servings from the milk group.</i>	58.6% 15.0% Strongly 43.6% Somewhat	18.3%	23.1% 3.6% Strongly 19.5% Somewhat
Respondents are split in their agreement with the following statements:			
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
<i>The focus on avoiding foods with fat, sugar and salt has contributed to the development of an overweight and undernourished population.</i>	40.4% 9.9% Strongly 30.5% Somewhat	24.4%	35.2% 17.8% Strongly 17.4% Somewhat
<i>Taking vitamin supplements is a good way for children to get their recommended daily nutrients.</i>	31.5% 3.2% Strongly 28.3% Somewhat	24.4%	44.1% 15.4% Strongly 28.7% Somewhat
	Respondents who indicated being aware of the term nutrient density tended to disagree with this statement while those that were not aware of the term tended to agree with this statement.		
Respondents generally disagreed with the following statement:			
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
<i>Adding calcium to bottled water or juice is a good milk substitute.</i>	18.8% 2.6% Strongly 16.2% Somewhat	19.4%	61.8% 35.4% Strongly 62.4% Somewhat

## **CONCLUSION**

In general there is fairly high awareness of the nutrient density/nutrient richness concept. School nutrition directors in smaller districts may not be as familiar with this concept. In general, those not familiar with the concept of nutrient density/richness had the same attitudes toward nutrient density related statements, however they were weaker in magnitude (i.e. "somewhat agree" versus "strongly agree") compared to those who were familiar with the concept.